

and Public Works held a hearing on the nomination of Oklahoma attorney general Scott Pruitt to lead the Environmental Protection Agency. The hearing was really about the future of this Agency and how we can get it back to doing the job it was meant to do from the very beginning.

We are blessed in this country with enormous natural resources. Our goal should be to use these resources responsibly in ways that protect our environment and help make our economy strong.

Over the past 8 years, the leaders of the Environmental Protection Agency created broad and legally questionable new regulations that undermined the American people's faith in the Agency. The political leaders of this Agency have been reckless, irresponsible, and arrogant.

A course of correction is long overdue, and it is exactly what we are going to get.

If my colleagues have any doubts that the EPA lost its way, they can just look at two of the biggest environmental scandals we have seen in a long time. In the summer of 2015, there was what became known as the Gold King Mine disaster. The Environmental Protection Agency spilled 3 million gallons of toxic wastewater into a river in Colorado. This was water filled with toxic substances like arsenic and lead. It flowed to New Mexico and Utah, through the land of the Navajo Nation and the Southern Ute Indian tribe. There are 200,000 people who drink water from the river system that the EPA poisoned. Farmers and ranchers couldn't use the water for their crops or their animals.

The other disaster the Environmental Protection Agency helped to cause was what happened in Flint, MI. The EPA failed to do the proper oversight. As a result, thousands of children were exposed to high levels of lead in their drinking water. The Agency knew about the dangers to the public health and for months did nothing to warn the people.

These are just two scandals where the Environmental Protection Agency actually harmed people's health because the EPA was negligent. There are also many ways the Agency has harmed families and the American economy, not by accident but intentionally. It has issued thousands of pages of regulations trying to shut down the entire coal industry in the United States. Since 2009, the Environmental Protection Agency has come out with nearly 200 new regulations.

According to the American Action Forum, the total cost of all of this new redtape is about \$340 billion. The Agency has piled enormous new restrictions and costs onto American families and businesses, all to produce miniscule benefits.

One of them was the so-called Clean Power Plan. States sued to block this destructive bureaucratic overreach. The courts had to step in and tell Washington not so fast.

We should be looking for ways to make American energy as clean as we can, as fast as we can, without raising costs for American families. That is not what the Environmental Protection Agency did with its power regulations.

The EPA also put out a new rule that dramatically expanded its own control over what it calls waters of the United States. The Agency declared that it has control over things like irrigation ditches and backyard ponds all across America. Two different courts have blocked this rule from taking effect. Why? Because it goes far beyond the Agency's own authority.

For 8 years now, the leaders of the EPA have not had their priorities straight. They have been pursuing a political agenda instead of focusing on what should be the Agency's core mission. The Environmental Protection Agency was created for a reason. It was created because America needed someone to perform this mission. There is a right way to do the job. We can strike the right balance so we protect our environment while allowing our economy to grow.

My home State of Wyoming is one of the most pristine States in the country, one of the most beautiful places in the world, as well as one of the most energy-rich States in the country. Wyoming has struck the right balance. We have done it successfully and so have many other States. We can address threats to our environment best through the cooperation of States, towns, Indian tribes, and Washington—a cooperation.

The quality of America's air, water, and land are local concerns as much as they are national concerns. The Environmental Protection Agency should not try to dictate regulations from Washington without consulting its partners at all levels.

Much of the work of the EPA was intended to give States a chance to take action first. Federal regulators are meant to be a backstop, acting when States or communities fail to act. Restoring this proper order and restoring the partnership of States with the EPA is essential to making sure people see the Agency as legitimate once again. The Agency needs to learn to listen before it acts.

We can also restore the Environmental Protection Agency by restating its commitment to the rule of law. That is why the American people elect a Congress—because of the rule of law. The Agency must enforce the laws as they are written by Congress. The Agency cannot write the laws, cannot ignore the parts of the laws it doesn't like, although that is exactly what this EPA has been doing.

We all know the EPA used to do very good work. In the past, it protected America's environment while understanding that there need to be reasonable regulations that allow people to use our natural resources. Every American wants clean air, clean water, and

commonsense protection for our species. That will not change. We need the EPA to do its job, and we need it to do the job right.

Through 6 hours of questioning before our committee last week, Scott Pruitt showed that he understands the need to return the Environmental Protection Agency back to its proper course. He showed he is committed to working as a partner with Americans all across the country to find the best ways to address the threats to our environment. His record as the attorney general of Oklahoma showed that he is committed to restoring and maintaining the rule of law.

I am confident that Attorney General Pruitt will be able to right the ship at the EPA. I am confident that he can restore the balance between the benefits the Agency can deliver for Americans with the costs that it imposes.

As chairman of the Committee on Environment and Public Works, I am committed to making sure the Senate exercises appropriate oversight to make sure that this happens.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HOEVEN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

REPEALING THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, Republicans in Congress have been on the warpath for a long time to repeal the Affordable Care Act. In fact, in this new Congress, their first order of business has been to pave the way for dismantling this law. Despite the fact that 20 million Americans have gained health insurance coverage thanks to this law, despite people no longer being denied coverage for preexisting conditions, despite big savings in health care costs, and despite everyone with insurance being able to access important preventive health services for free, my Republican colleagues have decided to repeal it. And, after 7 years to get ready, they have no replacement, not even a path to a replacement at this point.

Yes, they are set on repealing a law that has provided both health and financial security to millions of Americans, with no replacement in sight, just at this point some empty IOU for some future piece of legislation that may or may not be any good. It is a little like being asked to jump out of an airplane without a parachute and being told: Trust us. We will build the parachute for you before you hit the ground.

We don't know what this nonexistent Republican replacement would look

like, but we sure do know what a repeal would do; it would gut health insurance premium tax credits that help millions of Americans obtain health insurance they could not otherwise afford. It would unwind an expansion of the Medicaid Program that covers millions more Americans in some 30 States that have chosen to participate, casting tens of millions of Americans—men, women, and children—out of their health insurance.

At the same time, it would deliver an enormous tax boon to millionaires and billionaires, as usual for Republicans, by repealing the revenue we used to pay for ObamaCare. This tax boon is a 16-percent reduction in the taxes owed by millionaires and billionaires on their investment income.

Republicans want to take health insurance away from tens of millions of ordinary Americans and simultaneously reward those at the very top of the income pile with a big tax benefit. So much for all the talk we have heard from Republicans about the deficit.

At least in Rhode Island, the Affordable Care Act is working. The law launched accountable care organizations that are improving care while lowering costs. In Rhode Island, Coastal Medical and Integra Community Care Network—two primary care-focused ACOs—are not only driving down per person health expenditures but achieving high marks on quality and on patient experience. In total, Coastal has saved \$24 million over 3 years and Integra has saved \$4 million in its first year as an ACO.

The Affordable Care Act also has protected seniors from the dreaded drug price doughnut hole, and I can tell you I heard a lot about the doughnut hole from seniors in Rhode Island when I was running for the Senate. The Affordable Care Act has protected families where someone had a chronic condition and couldn't get insurance, and the Affordable Care Act has prevented insurers from throwing customers off coverage when they get sick.

It is true that some of the health insurance exchanges haven't attracted enough competition. We can fix that. Indeed, to help with that issue, Senators BROWN, FRANKEN, and I are today introducing the Consumer Health Options and Insurance Competition Enhancement Act, or the CHOICE Act, to add a public health insurance option to the health insurance exchanges. This public option would guarantee that consumers always have an affordable, high-quality option when shopping for health insurance and a strong health care fallback when markets fail.

ObamaCare may not be perfect, but it has done an awful lot of good. Millions of Americans who lacked insurance now have it, and the rate of uninsured Americans has fallen to 8.6 percent, about half of what it was in 2010. Projected Federal health care costs are down nearly \$3 trillion.

Instead of demolishing a system that works well for millions of Americans

with no replacement on the horizon, let's use our proposal to make it better. Let's add a public option to our health insurance exchanges.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, if I could address another topic now and ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 15 minutes in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF SCOTT PRUITT

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, the question I bring to the floor today is what is Scott Pruitt hiding? Last week, the Environment and Public Works Committee held a hearing on President Trump's nominee to the Environmental Protection Agency. Today, for my 155th "Time to Wake Up" speech, I have unanswered questions about Mr. Pruitt's fitness for that role. His evasiveness at his hearing signaled nothing good about his ties to the industry he would regulate if confirmed, and the lack of curiosity about these industry ties from my Republican colleagues speaks volumes about the political clout of that industry.

One question stood out. Our new chairman, Senator BARRASSO, posed the standard question of nominees to Mr. Pruitt in our hearing: "Do you know of any matters, which you may or may not have disclosed, that might place you in any conflict of interest if you are confirmed?"

Mr. Pruitt answered: "No."

Scott Pruitt crawls with conflict of interest. He has conflicts of interest with the fossil fuel industry from his political fundraising. We just don't know how bad. He likely has conflicts of interest from confidential private meetings with fossil fuel companies at Republican Attorneys General Association get-togethers, but we just don't know how bad. There is almost certainly evidence of conflict of interest in his undisclosed emails with fossil fuel companies, but again we don't know how bad. He came clean on none of this in his confirmation hearing.

This chart is a simple, and a likely incomplete, representation of the many financial links reported between Pruitt and the fossil fuel industry. At the top are the companies and the entities that have supported Mr. Pruitt with political funding. Down below are the political organizations for which he has raised money.

Pruitt for Attorney General was his reelection campaign. The polluters gave to Pruitt for Attorney General. Oklahoma's Strong PAC was his leadership PAC, a separate political fundraising vehicle. The polluters gave to Oklahoma Strong.

There was another one here called Liberty 2.0, Mr. Pruitt's super PAC, but he closed it down so we don't list it. While it existed, his super PAC took nearly \$200,000 in fossil fuel industry contributions. Mr. Pruitt served as the chair of the Republican Attorneys General Association in 2012 and 2013 and

was a member of RAGA's executive committee through 2015. Between 2014 and 2016, RAGA received \$530,000 from Koch Industries. It received \$350,000 from Murray Energy. It received \$160,000 from ExxonMobil, and it received \$125,000 from Devon Energy.

Devon Energy, by the way, is the company whose letter Mr. Pruitt transposed virtually verbatim onto his official letterhead to send to the EPA as the official position of the Oklahoma attorney general.

During his hearing, Mr. Pruitt refused to provide details about any solicitations he made from regulated industries for the Republican Attorneys General Association. We know they got special attention from RAGA. Here is a confidential 2015 meeting agenda from RAGA when Pruitt was on its executive committee. I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the meeting agenda page.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

RAGA SUMMER NATIONAL MEETING 2015, THE GREENBRIER, WEST VIRGINIA

MEETING AGENDA

The Greenbrier; 300 West Main Street, White Sulphur Springs, WV; (855) 616-2441.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 1, 2015

A Cyber Lounge and Hospitality Suite are provided all day for your convenience by Rent-A-Center in the Chesapeake Bay Room, 5:40 PM—Lead Shuttles for West Virginia Host Committee Dinner. Location: Front Main Entrance of the Hotel.

6:00 PM–8:00 PM—West Virginia Host Committee Reception & Dinner; Location: Kate's Mountain Lodge; Special Guest: Homer Hickam—American author; Vietnam veteran, and a former NASA engineer. His autobiographical novel *Rocket Boys: A Memoir*, was a No. 1 New York Times Best Seller, and was the basis for the 1999 film *October Sky*.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 2, 2015

A Cyber Lounge and Hospitality Suite are provided all day for your convenience by Rent-A-Center in the Chesapeake Bay Room 7:00 AM–10:30 AM—Breakfast (on your own); Location: Main Dining Room; *Breakfast is included, please provide your room key to the waiter. Please note: denim and exercise attire are not permitted.

11:00 AM–12:30 PM—AG Business Meeting; *Attorneys General and Staff Only; Location: Eisenhower A & B.

12:30 PM–2:00 PM—RAGA ERC & Capital Club Lunch: What Difference Does It Make? Measuring the Success of Republican AGs; Location: Chesapeake Room; Speaker: Attorney General Pam Bondi, Florida.

2:00 PM–5:30 PM—Private Meetings with Attorneys General and Staff; *Attorneys General and Staff Only; Location: Eisenhower A & B.

2:00 PM–2:40 PM—Private meeting with Murray Energy; *Attorneys General and Staff Only; Location: Eisenhower A & B.

2:50 PM–3:10 PM—Private meeting with Microsoft; *Attorneys General and Staff Only; Location: Eisenhower A & B.

3:15 PM–3:35 PM—Private meeting with Southern Company; *Attorneys General and Staff Only; Location: Eisenhower A & B.

3:40 PM–4:00 PM—Private meeting with American Fuel Petrochemical Manufacturers; *Attorneys General and Staff Only; Location: Eisenhower A & B.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. This confidential agenda mentions a private meeting